

Minister Rasim Ljajić's address to the Council of Europe's Conference of the Ministers responsible for social cohesion – Investing in Social Cohesion: Investing into Stability and Well-being of Society – Moscow, 26-27 February 2009

Mr. Chairman, (Madam Chair)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour to greet the distinguished participants of this important Conference on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Russian Federation for the excellent hosting of the Conference. Experience sharing and conclusions adopted on such conventions are invaluable for joint achievement of defined goals. Let me express my sincere belief that the conclusions of this Conference, in form of Declaration, will be a milestone for further development of social cohesion that represents vital element of stable and sustainable societies of today.

Social cohesion implies capacity of a society to enable welfare and benefit for all its members while reducing economic and societal gaps and differences to a minimum in constant fight against social exclusion and poverty. It is an ideal to be pursued, as it enables development of individual and collective potentials underlying evolvement of any society in terms of cultural, economic and any other progress.

Today, it is financial crisis that we must take into account in our efforts to perceive future of any community and further progress of social cohesion, since

it has been affecting transition countries in its particular ways.

In the Republic of Serbia, and I am aware, in other transition countries, social cohesion has been essentially contributing to the reforms in general. The Republic of Serbia is strongly committed to a policy according to which diversity and different aspects in society are not an obstacle but requirement for promotion of a stable society. Compromise reaching, defining common goals, social integration of vulnerable and marginalized groups of population, social inclusion fostered through social dialogue and partnership, all these are targets our country is set to reach through development of legislation aligned with the EU standards and active membership in international organisations. Also, Serbia follows recommendations and views of the European Committee for Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe reflected in reconciliation between sustainable economic growth and investing in people. Better access to social rights and social security alongside policies ensuring welfare and well-being for families with children, care for the elderly and effective social inclusion by way of housing, employment, education and training, healthcare, income support programmes and social services is one of the priorities of the Republic of Serbia. Furthermore, I would like to stress that effective public policies are based on and reinforced by sound cooperation with civil society, non-governmental organisations, trade unions, employers and others.

The Republic of Serbia is committed to its active role in all the activities contributing to enhancement of social cohesion towards society as a basis for personal

feeling of happiness, quality life and well –being of any individual, which is on a larger scale a foundation for satisfactory life-style, sound values, higher levels of social capital and social and cultural identity.

Finally, I would like to conclude with the following: let the sense of belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition be driving forces to guide this distinguished convention in the efforts to realize in practice the ideas of better society to which we all belong.